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INEQUITIES IN RURAL TRANSPORTATION

The lack of transportation is one of the most frequently cited problems of rural residents. Federal funds to support public transportation have historically been inequitably allocated between urban and rural areas. This inequity has a particularly significant impact on people with disabilities who live in rural areas. While the 1998 authorization of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) increased the total amount of funds for public support of transportation and increased the funds available for rural transportation and transportation for the elderly and individuals with disabilities, the discrepancy between urban and rural transportation allocations remains significant. About 25% of the nation's population lives in rural areas but only about 6% of transportation funds are allocated to rural areas. That leaves 94% of transportation funds going to subsidize transportation for the 75% of the population living in urban areas.

The following table outlines the projected allocations of TEA-21 through the beginning of the next century. We estimate that an allocation of an additional \$523 million for rural transportation would be required to equalize funding between urban and rural areas on the basis of population alone. The magnitude of this discrepancy suggests one of the reasons transportation has been a consistent problem in rural areas.

Projected Federal Funding for Public Transportation Affecting People with Disabilities from 1998 through 2003: The Differential Effects of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century

TEA-21 Programs	FY '98 Federal Allocations		FY '03 Projected Federal Allocation		Percent Change From FY '98 to FY '03
	Allocation	Percent		Percent	
Urban (5307)	\$2,299,000,000	94.5%	\$3,596,000,000	93.7%	54%
Rural (5311)	\$ 134,000,000	5.5%	\$ 241,000,000	6.3%	79%
Elderly & Individuals with Disabilities (5310)	\$ 62,219,389	Data not reported by urban & rural expenditures	\$ 90,652,801	Data not available for urban & rural comparisons	46%

It is important to note that data allowing us to analyze the urban and rural distribution of funds in the program targeting elderly and individuals with disabilities are not reported by Congress or the Department of Transportation.

This funding pattern continues the historically inequitable allocation of transportation support to rural areas. This inequity has the following effects:

1. People living in urban areas who do not own a car average about 955 publicly subsidized trips per year, an average of about 80 trips per month or nearly 20 rides for each work week.
2. In contrast, people living in rural areas who don't own a car average only about 38 publicly subsidized rides per year, an average of only about 3 trips per month or fewer than one ride per work week. Obviously, this discrepancy can make getting and keeping employment relatively more difficult in rural areas.
3. About 37 million rural residents - 40% of all rural residents - live in the nation's 1,200 counties that have no public transportation at all.

Recommendations

- ◆ First, the Department of Transportation should develop a report (Section 5310) detailing the urban and rural allocation of funds for the elderly and people with disabilities.
- ◆ Second, means and ways for increasing transportation funding for rural residents must be developed and pursued.

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